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ABSTRACT

As part of a study of the quality of life in northwestern Wisconsin, 1974 sample populations (N=150 residents per county) from each of 4 west central counties (Dunn, Clark, Eau Claire, and Polk) were presented with a list of public service programs and asked if they should be "expanded", "kept the same", or "cut back". Percentages on comparable items from a 1973 study in St. Croix County and from a 1974 study of leaders of 31 communities in the west central region were used for comparisons. The service list included programs for: teenagers; drug prevention/treatment; public housing; the aged; medical services/doctors; mental health; social services (welfare and food stamps); state and Federal highways; local streets/roads; public transportation; schools; vocational training; other adult education; university extension; library/bookmobile; art and music; police; water pollution control; areas for wildlife protection; public promotion of tourism. Results indicated: programs for special age groups, medical care, wildlife protection, and vocational training were priorities in all the counties; social services and tourism were the only programs which rated less allocations; the leaders were more in favor of expanded services, particularly economicall related programs, than the general public; the west central population was generally more satisfied with its services than the northwestern population. (JC)

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PREFERENCES FOR EXPANSION OF PUBLIC SERVICES IN FIVE WEST CENTRAL WISCONSIN COUNTIES

by

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COOPERATIVE EXTENSION PROGRAMS
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-EXTENSION

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PREFERENCES FOR EXPANSION OF PUBLIC SERVICES IN FIVE WEST CENTRAL WISCONSIN COUNTIES

(Prepared by V. Lambert)

Following questions on community problems and local services (Report No. 7) sample residents in four west central counties (Clark, Dunn, Eau Claire and Polk) were questioned about the support for public services, as part of a "quality of life" study. Each person was presented with a list of programs and asked whether they should be "expanded", "kept the same", or "cut back". The question was prefaced with a reminder that more services generally mean higher taxes. The results, then, indicate not only the services which are lacking in these counties, but also those services which people think merit more public expenditure. Approximately 150 people from each county were included in the sample.

Table 1 shows the percentage of the total sample in each county who said that services should be expanded, or cut back (if five percent or more). Percentages on comparable items from a 1973 study in St. Croix County and from a 1974 study of leaders of 31 communities in the west central district[1] are included for purposes of comparison.

Table 2 shows the 10 services in each county having the highest percentage in favor of expansion, giving an indication of the top priority programs. In interpreting this table, two factors should be kept in mind. First, policy questions which have not been included here may actually be more important than any of these items. For example, results of the 1974 study, where "promotion of industry" was included, suggest that it would probably be among the priority items in all counties. Second, the fact that a particular program does not appear as a priority does not necessarily mean it is unimportant. Rather, it may indicate satisfaction

[1] D.E. Johnson, Palmer McCoy, et al, "Leaders Attitudes Toward Growth Center Strategies in West Central Wisconsin, "University of Wisconsin-Extension publication, in progress.

with existing programs (i.e., most people say it should be "kept the same"), or that substantial improvement in the service would require unjustified increased spending.

In addition to discussion of responses by county, attention is also given to differences within the counties by place of residence, age, education and income of the respondents.[2]

Priority Programs

Overall, residents are satisfied with the public services in their communities, with the majority of people saying that spending on most services should be kept at the present level. However, there is a consensus across the counties on the priority programs for expansion. Programs for teenagers and the elderly, medical services, vocational training, and areas for protection of wildlife appear among the top ten programs in all counties. The leaders are more strongly in favor of expansion than are the people in general, with 50 percent or more of the leaders favoring the expansion of seven programs. Among the broad population of the counties, only two to four programs receive majority support for increases.

The only service which more people feel should be cut back rather than expanded is "social services in general - including welfare and food stamps". Opposition to this program is especially strong in Clark County where only five percent of the people think it should be expanded, while half of those questioned think it should be reduced.

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[2] For this analysis, we looked at responses in each county by age (three categories: under 35, 35 to 64, and 65 and over), education (three categories: no high school diploma, high school diploma, and some college), income (four categories: under $5,000 to $10,000, $10,000 to $16,000, and over $16,000), and place of residence (urban, village, rural).

TABLE 1

PERCENTAGE INDICATING EXPANSION OF SERVICES, BY COUNTY

(Percentage Wanting Services Cut Back 5 percent or more in Parentheses)

	1974 Survey				1973 Survey	1974 Study of Community Leaders
	Clark	Dunn	Eau Claire	Polk	St. Croix	Leaders
Programs for Teenagers[1]	53	50	52	65	52	69
Drug Prevention & Treatment	59	52	59	63	58	58
Public Housing (incl. for elderly)	33	50	57	47	20 (7)	41 (11)
Programs for the Aged	35	46	53	54	46	67
Medical Services & Doctors	42	33	38	41	35	39
Mental Health Programs	33	31	32	38	24	29
Social Services (Welfare & Food Stamps)	5 (50)	11 (34)	15 (31)	7 (39)	9 (31)	3 (38)
State & Federal Highways[2]	18	10 (6)	15	27		
Local Streets & Roads[2]	32	26	36	34	18 (6)	33
Public Transportation	25	47	38	35	30	59
Schools	16	24	24 (5)	26	22 (5)	33
Vocational Training[3]	29	30	35	36	41	55
Other Adult Education	21	26	25	26	22	49 (6)
University Extension	10	12	14	19	12	31 (7)
Library & Bookmobile Services	21	27	27	27	23	50
Art & Music Programs	23	17	21	24	18	35
Police	26	23	21	35	27	23
Water Pollution Control	24	41	43	47	47	48
Areas for Wildlife Protection[4]	30	30	44	36	45	--
Public Parks	16	18	27	26	24	44
Public Forests[5]	13	25	27	27	--	--
Public Promotion of Tourism	11	13 (8)	18 (8)	16 (12)	19 (7)	50

1. 1973 Study and 1974 Leaders Study - Programs for Youth
2. 1973 Study and 1974 Leaders Study - these 2 items were combined as Roads and Highways
3. 1973 Study and 1974 Leaders Study - Job Training
4. Not included in 1974 Leaders Study
5. Not included in 1973 Study or in 1974 Leaders Study

TABLE 2

TEN SERVICES MOST IN NEED OF EXPANSION, BY COUNTY

(Percent Favoring Expansion)

	1974 Study				1973 Study	1974 Study of Community Leaders
	Clark	Dunn	Eau Clarie	Polk	St. Croix	Leaders
1	Drugs(59)	Drugs(52)	Drugs(59)	Teenagers(65)	Drugs(58)	Youth Programs(69)
2	Teenagers(53)	Teenagers(50)	Housing(57)	Drugs(62)	Youth Programs(52)	Aged(67)
3	Medical(42)	Housing(50)	Aged(53)	Aged(54)	Wat.Poll.(47)	Pub.Trans.(59)
4	Aged(35)	Pub.Trans.(47)	Teenagers(50)	Wat.Poll.(47)	Aged(46)	Drugs(58)
5	Men.Health(33)	Aged(46)	Wildlife(44)	Housing(47)	Wildlife(45)	Job Train.(55)
6	Housing(33)	Wat.Poll.(41)	Wat.Poll.(43)	Medical(41)	Job Tra.n.(41)	Library(50)
7	Loc.Rds.(32)	Medical(33)	Medical(38)	Men.Health(38)	Medical(35)	Tourism(50)
8	Wildlife(30)	Men.Health(31)	Pub.Trans.(38)	Voc.Tr.(36)	Pub.Trans.(30)	Adult Ed.(49)
9	Voc.Tr.(29)	Wildlife(30)	Loc.Rds.(36)	Wildlife(36)	Police(27)	Wat.Poll.(48)
10	Police(26)	Voc.Tr.(30)	Voc.Tr.(35)	Police(35) Pub.Trans.(35)	Men.Health(24) Parks(24)	Parks(44)

Programs for Teenagers and Drug Programs

Lack of opportunities for young people is seen as a major problem in these counties, and the need for more programs for teenagers and for drug prevention and treatment stands out as particularly important. In all counties at least half of the respondents are in favor of expansion of both services. The desire for improvement is especially strong in Polk County.

The percentages of those favoring expansion of programs for teenagers are generally higher in the cities and villages than in the rural areas, while drug programs are generally more favored in rural areas. The only exception is in Eau Claire county where the percentage favoring expansion of drug programs is highest for city residents.

Public Housing and Programs for the Aged

A major problem of the West Central Region as a whole is a general lack of housing. Support for expansion of public housing is relatively high in all four counties studied in 1974, but only in Dunn and Eau Claire, the most urban counties, do more than half of the people favor expansion. Expanded public housing was not a priority program in St. Croix in 1973, perhaps because of recent construction of public housing there. Residents of cities and small towns favor additional spending more than do rural residents, and overall, support for expansion increased with age and education, although the differences between groups are small.

Most housing projects in this region are for the elderly and the strong support of expanded public housing and of programs for the aged probably reflects a concern for the elderly population in these counties. Since both programs benefit this older group, it is interesting to compare the responses on these two items by age categories. The two younger

groups (18 to 34 and 35 to 64) give much higher support to expanded programs for the aged than do people over 65, while the differences among the age groups in support for expanded public housing are small. In general, programs for the aged are also a higher priority than public housing programs among the younger groups. On the other hand, for people over 65, in all counties except Polk, housing is a higher priority than programs for the aged. In Eau Claire County, 56 percent of those over 65 think that more public housing is needed.

Health and Medical Care

At least a third of the people in all counties think that more medical services and doctors are needed, and, in all counties except Eau Claire, which is a center for health care in the region, mental health services also appear among the top ten programs for expansion.

People over 65 are less likely to favor expansion of medical services than are those 18 to 64 years old, but the importance of this service in terms of priorities is about the same across age groups. Support for expansion is higher among high school graduates and people who have attended college, than for those who did not complete high school. Differences by income and rural or urban residence are small.

Expansion of mental health programs is supported most by the 18 to 34 age group and by those with some education beyond high school. In all counties except Clark the highest income group (over $16,000) is more favorable toward expansion than are the others (in Clark, the percentage for the $10,000 to $16,000 groups is highest), and residents of cities are more likely to want expansion than are those of villages or rural areas.

Roads and Public Transportation

Interstate 94 cuts across the West Central Region and is probably responsible in part for the relative satisfaction of people with the state and federal highways in the area. However, local streets and roads and public transportation are in need of improvements. In Clark and Eau Claire counties, local streets and roads are among the top ten programs for expansion. In Eau Claire, village and rural non-farm residents, and in Clark, small city and rural residents are most in favor of increased spending on roads.

Public transportation is among the top ten programs in all counties except Clark, and in Dunn County, almost half of the people favor expansion of services. Support for increased spending on public transportation is very high in the City of Menominee (80 percent). In Eau Claire, the other large city in the sample, only 36 percent think public transportation should be expanded, perhaps reflecting recent spending on the bus system there. In general, rural farm residents are least in favor of expansion, while the percentages for rural non-farm and village residents are high. In all the counties, expanded public transportation is a higher priority for people over 65 than for the younger age groups. These results suggest that people in areas outside cities, particularly the elderly, feel that more inter-community public transportation is needed.

Educational Cultural Services

Overall, expansion of educational programs is seen as a lower priority than the services already discussed. In Clark, support for expanded schools is exceptionally low with 16 percent favoring expansion, and only about a fourth of the people in the other counties favor more money for schools.

Support for school expansion decreases markedly with age in all counties, (except in Clark where the 35 to 64 age group is very low (9 percent)). Only about 10 percent of those over 65 favor expansion. In general, support increases with education and income. In Polk County, more than half of the people who attended college favor expansion, as compared to eight percent of those who did not complete high school. Differences by residence are small.

Among the other educational programs (vocational training, other adult education, university extension, library and book mobile service, and art and music programs), vocational training stands out as the highest priority overall, being among the top ten programs in all four counties. About a fourth of the people favor expansion of other adult education, library and bookmobile services and art and music programs (lower in Dunn, 17 percent), while expansion of university extension services is a low priority.

The pattern of support for expansion of these programs by age, education and income are basically the same as that found for schools. People under 35 years old are much more in favor of expansion of adult education and library services than are the older age groups. About half of this group want more of these programs in all counties. People who made more than $16,000 last year are highly favorable toward expansion of vocational training except in Clark County (20 percent). The differences by place of residence are small, although rural residents in general are somewhat less favorable toward expansion than people in the cities and villages.

Police

Support for expansion of police and law enforcement programs is relatively low, although it does appear among the top ten programs in Clark and Polk counties, with a third of the people in Polk saying more police are needed. As noted in Report No. 7, residents of Polk are more likely than others to cite problems of disorder as important community problems and they also give a lower rating to crime prevention and control.

The percentage favoring expansion is generally highest among the middle age group (35 to 64) and among those who did not finish high school. Differences by income and place of residence are small.

Environment and Tourism

Several programs were included in the list which deal broadly with environmental conditions--water pollution control programs, public forest lands, public parks, and areas for wildlife protection.

Water pollution control is among the priorities everywhere except in Clark County. The percentage favoring more spending on water pollution control is lower for those over 65 than for the two younger age groups. With respect to education people who have attended college show the strongest support for expansion (over 50 percent), except in Clark where this group is quite low (14 percent). Differences by income and place of residence are small. Farmers tend to be less favorable toward expansion than urban or rural non-farm residents.

The other environmental program for which support for expansion is strong is "areas for wildlife protection". This is among the priorities in all counties. Support for increased spending is higher among the 18 to 34 age group than the others and generally increases with education.

Percentages favoring expanded public parks and forests are low, especially in Clark County. The low level of support for more parks and forests may reflect in part the low level of interest in expansion of promotion of tourism. Support for more tourism is very low everywhere, and in all counties except Clark a substantial number of people want the revenue spent here to be cut back. (For a more complete discussion of these items on the environment and tourism see Report No. 9).

Comparison to Responses of Community Leaders

The 209 people included in the 1974 study of community leaders were drawn from all nine counties of the West Central region rather than from these five counties only. Therefore, some of the differences between their responses and those the general public may be due to varying conditions in the counties.

In general, the leaders are more favorable toward expansion of services than are the people. However, the top priority programs for both groups are the same--programs for teenagers, the aged, and drug programs. In terms of public housing, medical services, social services, state and federal highways, police, and water pollution control, support for expansion among the leaders is about the same as for everyone else.

Leaders tend to be more favorable toward increased spending on educational and cultural services than is the general public and they give especially strong support to vocational education (some of the difference here may be due to the difference in the wording of the question), and to library and bookmobile services. Since the leaders are probably drawn from the more highly educated people in their communities their strong support of these programs is not surprising.

The most significant difference between the leaders and the others is the high percentage of leaders who favor expansion of promotion of tourism. While less than 20 percent of the people in the five counties want more publicity for tourism, 50 percent of the leaders want to increase spending here. The leaders appear to be more oriented toward economic development of the region than is the general public, but the information here seems to indicate that they will encounter substantial opposition to their efforts.

Consistent with their desire to expand promotion of tourism, leaders are also more favorable than the others to increased spending on public parks, local roads and public transportation.

Conclusion

Programs for special age groups, medical care, wildlife protection and vocational training are priorities in all the counties. In most of the region, water pollution control and transportation services (except for highways) also are important.

Spending on educational and cultural programs, other environmental protection services, police and public promotion of tourism is generally seen as adequate. The only programs which a significant number of residents think should be allocated less funds are social services and tourism, although opposition also is found in Dunn County to state and federal highways, and in Eau Claire, to vocational training.

Overall, the support for more spending on public services is lower in Clark County than in the others perhaps reflecting the rural nature of the county, since rural residents are more likely than others to say that programs should be kept the same rather than expanded. Polk County, like

Clark, has no larger cities, but support for expansion of services is relatively high there. The need for more programs there probably is due to the large recent growth in population and the influx of tourists and summer residents which has increased the demand for services.

While the leaders are more favorable toward expansion of services overall than is the general public they stand out from the others in their particularly strong support for economically related programs, especially public promotion of tourism. In general, the younger a person the more favorable he is toward expansion of services, and support for increased spending also increases with education and income.

Overall, the people of the west central region are more satisfied with the services in their area than are people in eight northwestern counties interviewed as a part of these same studies (see, Report No. 2: "Preferences for Expansion of Public Services in Eight Northwest Wisconsin Counties"). This is particularly true in the areas of transportation and medical care.